

CHICAGO – Joined by local and national environmental leaders, U.S. Representatives Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Dan Lipinski (D-IL) announced bipartisan legislation today that would ban sewage dumping in the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Water Protection Act would increase penalties for coastal cities that dump sewage into lake systems.

“Each year, more than 24 billion gallons of sewage are dumped into the crown jewel of the Midwest – the Great Lakes,” Congressman Kirk said. “Detroit is the primary culprit, with more than 13 billion gallons dumped annually. We need to bring coastal cities in line with Chicago’s water treatment reforms to ensure that we stop poisoning our water supply. By increasing penalties for dumping and creating a Great Lakes Clean-Up Fund, we can ensure the environmental health of our water resources for future generations.”

Current penalties for dumping sewage are capped at \$25,000 per violation per day, and penalty funds return to the U.S. Treasury. The Great Lakes Water Protection Act would increase those penalties to up to \$100,000 per violation per day after 2027.

The bill would also create a Great Lakes Clean-Up Fund within the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF). Penalties collected would go into this fund and be reallocated to the states surrounding the Great Lakes. These funds will be spent on wastewater treatment options, with a special focus on habitat protection and wetland restoration. The bill also requires greater transparency for volume and occurrences of sewage dumping by states surrounding the Great Lakes.

More than 40 million people rely on the Great Lakes for their drinking water. Sewage dumping is a contributing factor to elevated levels of E. coli bacteria, the primary reason for beach closures in the summer. There are more than 1,400 freshwater beaches along 5,500 miles of Great Lakes’ shoreline in eight states. Of the 67 beaches in Illinois, 54 (81 percent), had at least one safety warning during the 2006 beach season due to unhealthy bacteria levels. In the 10th Congressional District, 118 reports of contamination occurred last year that exceeded health standards, affecting 52 percent of beaches along the north suburban shore.

Closing a Lake Michigan beach due to bacteria contamination has an economic cost from \$7,935 to \$37,030 per day.

Recognizing the important steps the legislation takes to preserve the Great Lakes, the following organizations have endorsed the bill:

- Alliance for the Great Lakes
- Audubon
- Audubon Minnesota
- City of Chicago
- Great Lakes Aquatic Network and Fund
- Lake Erie Region Conservancy
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
- National Parks Conservation Association
- National Wildlife Federation
- Natural Resources Defense Council

The introduction of the legislation comes during National Clean Beaches Week (June 29 to July 5), which was created to educate the public about the importance of sustainable beaches throughout the country.